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ABSTRACT

NASILP (the National Association of Self-Instructional Language Programs) is a professional organization of academicians focusing on the development of self-instructional programs, primarily for uncommonly taught languages. Although the number of students in these languages is proportionally increasing, teachers find themselves in professional isolation. NASILP gives them an opportunity to share opinions on teaching methodology and to keep abreast of new developments in the field of self-instruction in foreign language. The benefit of developing knowledge correlates with the responsibility to share the results of thinking and research. NASILP provides an opportunity to share knowledge with colleagues in two publications: the conference proceedings and the NASILP newsletter. In order to fulfill the broader commitment to keep colleagues informed, it might be desirable to have the national meeting coincide with that of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages. The potential expanded role of self-instructional language programs in contemporary post-secondary schools should be considered. The student should be provided with the opportunity to develop both linguistic skills and broader comprehensive skills. Humanization of the learning process is a serious challenge. Other responsibilities include keeping NASILP informed of alternative self-instructional courses and writing reviews for those interested in these programs. (Author/CLK)

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BENEFITS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERSHIP IN NASILP

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

A PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

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NASILP is a unique organization. It is the only professional organization of academicians whose special concern and interest is in the development of self-instructional language programs, primarily for the uncommonly taught languages, though not necessarily restricted to these. Whether we are academic deans, directors of programs, or teachers and examiners of the uncommonly taught languages we are a special people with expertise that by now embraces all aspects of self-instructional language study. It is especially for the teachers and examiners, one of whom I am, that NASILP is an important professional organization. My personal perspective focuses especially on the benefits and responsibilities of NASILP membership for them, but as we shall see, with important consequences for all our colleagues.

Most teachers of uncommonly taught languages are isolated people; even when they are members of a larger department, they often have no colleagues, or very few with whom they can discuss the problems of instruction in their language. The teacher of an uncommonly taught language has many special problems, foremost among these the dearth of teaching materials. In an article entitled: "Expanding the Options," Allouche and Ervin observe:¹

A teacher of Spanish, French, or German may be somewhat shocked to realize that, while he is faced with the problem of choosing from an often bewildering array of texts (not to mention the vast amount of supplementary materials that are available) for his classroom, teachers of other languages - even of some widely spoken languages - are limited to one or two texts and one or two dictionaries. In some cases even these are not available.

The dearth of teaching materials is no surprise when one considers the small number of students who are learning an uncommonly taught language. In 1974 the percentage was only two, some two thousand students of the nearly one million who were studying a foreign language. It is comforting to know, however, that "enrollments in these languages have

increased in relationship to overall foreign language enrollments, which have in turn been decreasing in relationship to total college and university enrollments."²

We are not only teachers of an uncommonly taught language but we are also teaching by an uncommon method, that of self-instruction. We are isolated in a double way, those of us who are involved in NASILP. Perhaps the generalization which Roland Goddu makes of foreign language teachers is especially true for teachers involved in NASILP. He observes:³

In a nation committed to equality and quality in all aspects of society, a foreign language teacher is faced with a continuing problem: Having overcome the throes of disinterest and neglect by peers in choosing a distinctly unpopular undergraduate major and having moved into a highly specialized and often isolated segment of the teaching profession, most practicing foreign language teachers have developed very strong personalities, opinions, values, and visions of society that are different from those of their colleagues. This difference has developed not through neglect but through exposure, choice, and education.

I am not sure that we all have visions of a new and different society, but we do have ideas about a revolutionary approach in teaching foreign languages. As those of us who come here regularly know full well, this approach requires constant analysis of and reflection about underlying assumptions and methodology. And here NASILP membership serves us well.

Our professional organization provides us and all interested teachers and administrators with an opportunity to keep abreast of developments in the area of self-instructional language programs. Each year I look forward to hearing from my distant colleagues as we share insights and exchange opinions. Here at the NASILP conference we are constantly on the frontier of a challenging alternative to the classroom teaching situation. We are very much aware of strengths and weaknesses in a program of self-instruction, for we have researched that area and discussed it many times. The Proceedings of the NASILP conference contain many articles of lasting value on many aspects of the pedagogy of self-instruction in foreign languages. That literature deals with important aspects of the program, including the place and role of the director, the tutor, the examiner, and the student.

Each year brings new information as our shared knowledge increases, but there are also new challenges. NASILP is engaged in a continuing critique of self-instruction in several respects, notably in the areas of underlying philo-

sophical assumptions about language instruction and the self-instruction methodologies which are available in our present courses of instruction in the uncommonly taught languages. Our program should be of interest to colleges and universities which have honor's programs or give qualifying competence examinations. A good self-instruction program, I have discovered, can even be used as a correspondence course. All these possibilities would never have occurred to me, had I not been a member of NASILP. My understanding of my role as a teacher has been enlarged through NASILP and that I consider a very genuine benefit of membership.

Moreover, through our NASILP organization I have developed contacts with other educators, some who are not even members. Thus I received a letter from a professor who had read the Proceedings of last year's conference and shared with me several articles which stressed the development of listening comprehension in early stages of the learning process. The author apparently feels that we are interested in new ideas, and that we are willing to continue our research in the pedagogy of language learning. He is right in his assumption, and I trust that he shall have an opportunity in the future to share his insights with us. As teachers we are ever learning and open to new developments in our field. As long as we are marked by the desire for shared critical enquiry we shall continue to provide leadership in the field of self-instructional language programs. And that is one of the privileges and benefits of NASILP membership for me, the teacher. And what is my privilege is also my responsibility, for benefits and responsibilities are but two sides of the same coin of professionalism.

All of us are professionals, experts and perhaps even enthusiasts about self-instruction in foreign language learning. As individuals but also as an association we have the responsibility to develop our knowledge about this methodology and share that knowledge with others. Each teacher, each examiner, each program director needs constantly to update his knowledge about foreign language learning and teaching. While en route to our conference I generally read the most recent issue of the ACTFL Foreign Language Education Series. The 1976 volume is entitled: An Integrative Approach to Foreign Language Teaching: Choosing Among the Options. The readings on significant aspects of contemporary language learning and teaching I found most rewarding.

Of special interest to members of NASILP is an article by Edith Krou Allouche and Gerard L. Ervin; which is entitled: "Expanding the Options: Curricula in Many Languages." The authors devote special attention to NASILP and observe:⁴

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A significant share of the current enrollment in the uncommonly taught languages at the post secondary level, particularly with nationwide enrollments of 100 or fewer, is accounted for by individuals in programs affiliated with the National Association of Self-Instructional Language Programs (NASILP).

As individuals we need to share with each other the results of our research, even as we are in fact doing today. It may interest you that this year I developed a placement test for students who had Dutch spoken at home but had had no formal language instruction. I found the test to be a good indicator of language knowledge as that pertains to vocabulary, morphology, and syntax. It enabled me to place several students in an advanced section. I could also use the test to measure the retention of my first year students after the summer vacation. Finally, I found the test useful to examine two students at another institution who had spent a year in the Netherlands and wished to get credit for their language learning experience. The test can, I think, be incorporated into our NASILP for Dutch, especially for those students who already have some background in the language. It would enable us to identify the lacunae in their knowledge of grammar, and aid us in knowing what to emphasize in the teaching program. Perhaps we need to share with each other the materials we have developed and so be of assistance to each other.

As colleagues we share our knowledge in our publications: The Conference Proceedings and the NASILP Newsletter. You are aware, I think, of the problems encountered by our president, Ed Neville, as he made a valiant and persistent effort to get our Proceedings for 1976 into print. He deserves our thanks and our applause. I would like to suggest, if I may, that we initiate planning for our conference earlier so that the participants have time to prepare and write out papers. That is, I take it, a part of our collective responsibility to each other. We should not rely on tape recordings for the texts of speeches!

We also have a broader responsibility to inform the colleagues out there, at colleges and universities around the country about NASILP. We should provide for a wider distribution of the Proceedings and of the Newsletters. In my judgement, we should seriously consider the desirability of meeting with the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages. Such a meeting would provide greatly enhanced possibilities for contact and communication with colleagues.

Quite obviously, each one of us has a responsibility to his or her institution. I find that writing a report on the conference for my colleagues and the academic deans keeps

them informed and interested. The language departments at Calvin College have endorsed NASILP and the Educational Policy Committee of our college has discussed self-instructional programs this past year, and has given them favorable consideration. It is now my task to make recommendations so that we can initiate a program at Calvin College.

As teachers we need to keep informed not only but we must also be thinking about the potential expanded role of self-instructional language programs in the contemporary post secondary schools. The ACTFL review for 1976 suggests new possibilities and new emphases. Lifelong learning is the theme of an article by Floyd L. Coppedge. The new emphasis on education as an ongoing activity throughout life may dictate some changes in teaching strategies. It may be more important for the student to develop language skills and cognitive insights that enable him or her to continue to study and to mature. A course of instruction which places primary emphasis on the ability to repeat memorized information, may not be the most beneficial to the student who is going to live in a foreign country. It suggests to me that we need to stress far more the development of broad comprehension skills (an extensive recognition vocabulary, for example) as well as the active but more restricted speaking skill. As our knowledge and insight increase, we need to integrate these into our programs of self-instruction, and into our goals for the learner, and into our examination procedures. In this way we shall always be dynamically involved with our discipline and with our student, and ever ready to adjust our program. Thus we may also seek to do greater justice to the student and his or her goals. Perhaps we need to ask why the student is enrolling in the self-instruction program, and ask what his or her specific needs are. Can we modify our program at some points, to motivate the student by being a little more concerned about him or her? Is the student interested in Indonesian anthropology, can we not include such readings in the program? As teachers we are dealing with human beings, and especially in the self-instructional program where contacts between teacher and examiner and student are minimal, we need to keep that in mind. Might it be desirable for the student to provide the examiner with a brief autobiographical sketch and a statement of his or her goals in learning the language? Could our center make available information about examiners, possibly provide pictures of them to students? Are there other things we can do to humanize the examination process? There is a challenge here for us which we should seriously consider.

Each teacher and examiner of an uncommonly taught language is a specialist with a much broader constituency, people who come to him for information. Each of us needs to keep informed about the development in the area of our language competence,

and we need to keep NASILP informed about them. Though I have writtten a text-book which is employed in our program, I should keep our center informed about alternative courses. It is the responsibility of NASILP to continue to provide reviews of self-instructional courses for the benefit of interested parties. Very often, we the teachers and examiners shall have to write these reviews. This is all part of our responsibility to the larger community which looks to us as individuals and as an association to provide leadership in the whole area of self-instructional language programs.

Finally, it is our responsibility to maintain quality programs, to be willing to make changes when need and better insight so dictate, and to be ever dynamically involved in all aspects of self-instructional language programs, not only as presently developed, but also to meet future challenges and needs. So we shall ever remain a dynamic organization, responding to new needs and challenges, serving the needs of others with our unique skills and scholarship.

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- 1 Allouche, E.K. and G.L. Ervin, "Expanding the Options," An Integrative Approach to Foreign Language Teaching: Choosing Among the Options, ed. G.A. Jarvis. Skokie, Ill.: National Textbook Co., 1976. p. 262
 - 2 Ibid., pp. 252-253
 - 3 Goddu, Roland, "Pursuing continuing education as a foreign language teacher: An overview," op. cit. p. 327
 - 4 Allouche and Ervin, p. 277